

# Assessing the First Year Experience: Using NSSE Data and Qualitative Approaches to Enhance Student Success

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*"We value what we measure"*

Wise decisions are  
needed about *what*  
to measure in the  
context of campus  
mission, values,  
and desired  
outcomes.



*"If you don't  
measure it, you can't  
manage it..."*

## Inquiring Minds....

- What data do you use to inform your understanding of the first year experience? In teaching first year students?
- In what curricular and co-curricular areas, specific courses, or transition points do first year students have the most difficulty? What measures do you use to monitor these issues?
- What are your current strengths in the first year experience?

## Session Objectives

- Reinforce need to use multiple forms of evidence to inform design, development, and to assess FY experience
- Increase familiarity with NSSE & BCSSE
- Introduce qualitative measures, ISES and focus groups
- Highlight effective institutional examples of using data to inform FY experience

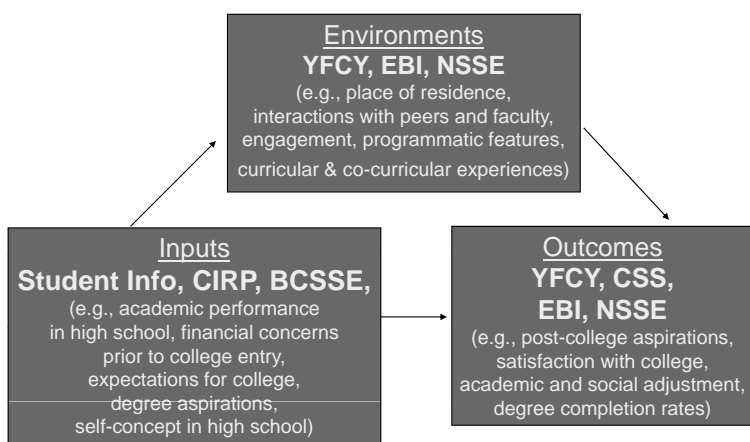
## What do we know? What assessments inform the First Year Experience?

- Research on effective educational practices and expectations (Keup, 2007; Miller, Kuh, Schuh, 2005; AAC&U Greater Expectations, 2002; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt & Associates, 2005; Schilling & Schilling, 2005; Upcraft, Gardner, Barefoot, 2005)
- Cooperative Institutional Research Program – 40 years of data on entering students; YFCY
- College Student Experience Questionnaire Research Program (CSXQ & CSEQ)
- Institutional data on entering students; gateway course success rates; persistence data; early alert statistics
- National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and the Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE)
- Foundations of Excellence project

## Why use multiple measures?

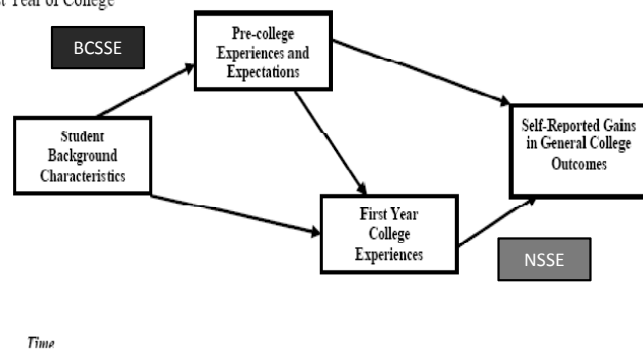
- Apply and combine several data points or sources to overcome weaknesses of single-measure studies
- Increase confidence in findings through convergence of different perspectives
- The point at which perspectives converge is seen to represent reality
- Builds a rich data resource
- Blending quantitative & qualitative approaches offers a more comprehensive assessment
- Qualitative approaches can involve more stakeholders in the process

## Multiple Measures: Astin's I-E-O Model



## BCSSE- NSSE First Year Conceptual Model: Expectations, Experiences & Educational Gains

Figure 1: Conceptual Model of Relationships between Student Background Characteristics, Pre-college Academic Experiences and Expectations, College Experiences, and Self-Reported Gains in Selected College Outcomes during the First Year of College



## Relevant Data Points: First College Year

Student Background	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Demographic characteristics</li> <li>HS GPA, Rank, Board Scores</li> <li>High school Experiences</li> <li>Academic self-efficacy</li> <li>Degree goals and career plans</li> </ul>
Pre-College Experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Attitudes, values, life goals</li> <li>Expectations about college, engagement, and academic performance</li> <li>Summer Bridge</li> <li>Orientation</li> </ul>
First Year Experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>First Year Seminar, Learning Community</li> <li>Early Alert program</li> <li>% W,D, F rates in FY courses</li> <li>Residential status and supportive environment</li> <li>Student engagement (academic experiences, student-faculty interaction, enriching experiences, active and collaborative learning)</li> </ul>

## Example: Relevant Data Points

### Student Profile

- HS GPA, Board scores, First-Generation stats

### Student Success Indicators

- FY retention and academic achievement rates
  - What is the breakdown by gender, age, socio-economic status, language spoken at home, and race/ethnicity?

### Curricular Trouble Spots

- In what courses or areas of curriculum do students experience difficulty? Likely trouble spots:
  - Courses where 30% of the students stop attending classes after 1 month; Courses where 50% of students earn low grades or withdraw; Courses that have a reputation among students for being tough; "gateway" courses

## Data Source: Pre-College Experiences, Expectations Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE)

- BCSSE (pronounced "bessie")
  - Designed as a companion to NSSE
  - Pilots in 2004-2006; 127 BCSSE schools in 2007!
- Purpose:
  - Measure entering first-year students' pre-college academic and co-curricular experiences.
  - Expectations and attitudes for participating in educationally purposeful activities during the first college year.

**New!**



## Questions to Answer with BCSSE

- Where are the gaps between our students HS experiences and college expectations and our hopes for their engagement in college?
- To what extent do high school experiences and engagement relate to expectations for the first-year of college?
- To what extent do student expectations for academic engagement and attitudes vary by gender, first-generation status, and high school achievement level?
- When combined with NSSE, BCSSE data can help identify expectation – college experience gap

## Answering Questions with BCSSE Data

- To what extent do entering students think they are prepared for college level work?

### Academic Preparation

Self-reports of academic preparedness may signal a student's likelihood of success. This scale measures the degree of confidence students have in their academic abilities. Items include how prepared students are to:

- Write clearly and effectively
- Speak clearly and effectively
- Think critically and analytically
- Analyze math or quantitative problems
- Use computing and information technology
- Work effectively with others
- Learn effectively on your own

## BCSSE and Academic Preparation

### % of entering students at "Institution A" that report lacking preparation...

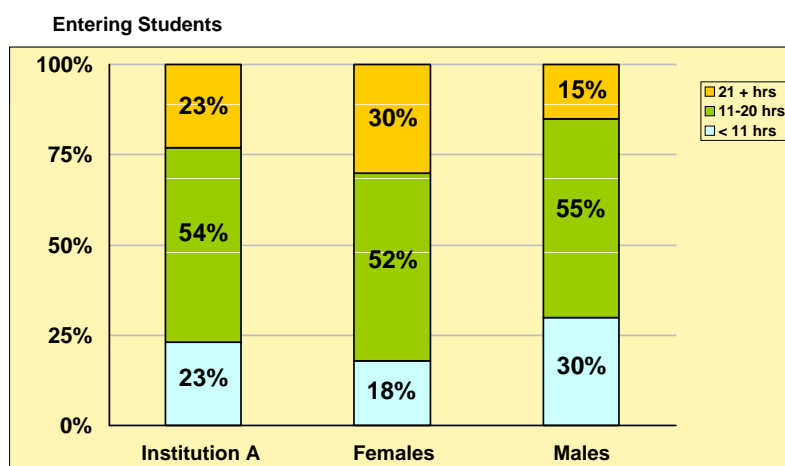
➤ Analyze math or quantitative problems	49%
➤ Write clearly and effectively	26%
➤ Use computing and information technology	24%
➤ Speak clearly and effectively	21%
➤ Think critically and analytically	18%
➤ Learn effectively on your own	15%
➤ Work effectively with others	8%

*What does this suggest for FY practice??*

## Answering Questions with BCSSE Data

- What do we know about entering students expectations about studying?
- BCSSE asks of entering college students:  
 "During the coming school year, about how many hours do you think you will spend in a typical 7-day week preparing for your class (studying, reading, writing, doing homework or lab work, analyzing data, rehearsing, and other academic activities)?"
- Does this differ by gender?

### BCSSE - Time Spent Studying per Week at "Institution A", by Gender

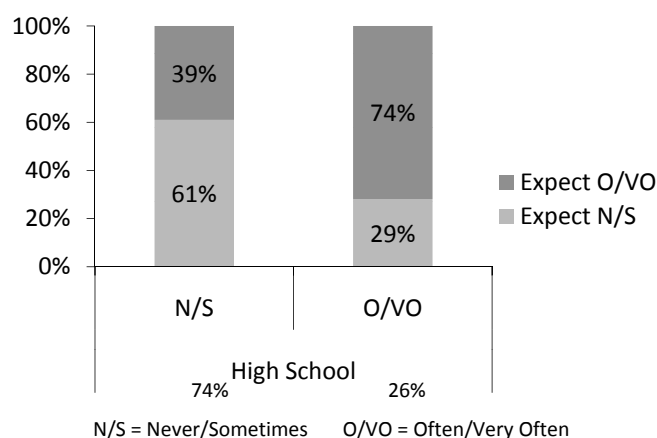


## BCSSE-Faculty Interaction

- What percent of students in high school report that they frequently (often + very often) interact with faculty outside of class?  
 a). 15% b). 26% c). 35% d). 42%

*Okay, so what is the relationship between student reports of the extent to which they interact with faculty outside of class in high school and their expectation for doing this in college?*

### BCSSE - Faculty Interaction



## Institutional Example: Using BCSSE to Become a Student-Centered Institution

- **Southern Connecticut State University** reviewed BCSSE & NSSE results in strategic planning process to create new FY initiatives , including a pilot FYE program, increased emphasis on recruitment & retention, and improvements to advising.
- **BCSSE results** distributed to **advisers** to help them better understand first-year students' expectations. FYE instructors shared BCSSE results with students in their FY seminars to actively involve students in the assessment process. Future administrations of BCSSE & NSSE will be used to evaluate these initiatives.

*National Survey of Student Engagement*  
(pronounced "nessie")

*Community College Survey of Student Engagement*  
(pronounced "cessie")



**College student surveys that assess the extent to which students engage in educational practices associated with high levels of learning and development**



## NSSE Results

- A window into the undergraduate experience
- Discover strengths and weaknesses in educational program
- Identify areas that need attention to improve student learning and success
- Help pinpoint aspects not in line with mission, or what institution expects
- Link with other institutional data

## What do first-year students do?

**1. What percent of full-time first-year students study, on average, more than 15 hours per week?**

- (a) 18%
- (b) 28%
- (c) 34%
- (d) 41%
- (e) 50%

## Worrisome Gap? Time spent studying

- First-year students average about 13-14 hrs. per week studying
- 60% of entering students expected to spend more than 15 hrs per week preparing for class
- Entering first-year students **EXPECT** to study more than they actually do in college
- Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE) data indicate that faculty expect students to spend more than twice that amount preparing (estimated 24-30 hrs. a week for FT)

## Using NSSE Data-- Example 1: Participation in Internships

- **NSSE Results:**
  - Internships: 78% FY "Plan to do" only 45% Seniors report "done"
  - FY & SRs report low gains in "acquiring work related knowledge"
  - Students wanted to participate in internships, but too few did
- **Campus Action:**
  - Used NSSE data to advocate hiring staff dedicated to overseeing this area of growth.
  - Increased campus advertising and focus on the internship program

## Example 2: Examining Co-curricular Involvement in the First Year

- Interpreting NSSE results for Institution B:  
*"About half our FY students spend no time on co-curricular activities, compared to only 31% at peer schools. This seems really low. What did our students do in high school?"*
- ✓ Admissions confirms most new students worked part-time jobs in high school, likely limiting co-curricular involvement. CIRP data reveal entering students lower than norm, place high value on practical work experience.

## Institutional Example: Focus on desired pedagogy



- NSSE data indicated First-year students less involved in service learning than JMU desired.
- Workshops conducted to encourage faculty to adapt courses to include service learning
- Studied change in participation of students and instructional practice



Used NSSE results to identify areas for increased focus including:

- need to develop & distribute a campus-wide philosophy
- create more exposure to diversity in FY & Gen Ed courses
- more professional development for faculty & administrators who work with first-year students
- creation of common components in the FY curriculum
- better & more effective communication with FY students
- promotion of service learning, mentoring, & undergraduate research to foster student-faculty interaction outside classroom

First Year Task Force established priorities including:

- "One Voice" syllabi for first-year courses
- Create reward system for faculty teaching first-year courses
- Develop First-Year Council of faculty & administrators with responsibility for first-year classes or programs
- Assessment of FYE programs and initiatives – in particular, the Student Success Seminar



## Truman State University Focus on Advising

Data: NSSE results low for quality advising; internal survey indicated professional advisors rated more highly than faculty advisors; faculty desired to improve advising

- ♦ Implemented professional advisors in residence halls to improve access to advisors
- ♦ Developed faculty – professional staff advising workshops, newsletter
- ♦ VP of Academic Affairs to carry out comprehensive assessment of advising

## Examining the FY Experience More In-Depth: Using Quantitative and Qualitative Assessments

- NSSE results can point to areas in need of more in-depth study
  - Focus Groups
  - Interviews with students and faculty
  - Self-studies

## Example: Using Focus Groups



- NSSE and CIRP pointed to problems with first year students' academic engagement, but WTAMU desired more holistic picture of students' experience
- Conducted "Student Engagement Audit Focus Groups" – 2 focus groups per college to discover what faculty and students found educationally engaging and identify classroom experiences that were engaging and disengaging

### Example: Focus Groups and Self-Study

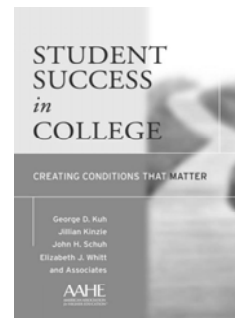


- **Committee on First-Year Experience (CoFYE)** conducted series of focus groups with students & faculty to gain greater insight into their NSSE results
- **Student responses suggested areas for improvement in curriculum & faculty development in FY experience**
- **CoFYE released self-study report, recommendations for other institutions planning a self-study of the first-year experience, thoughts on what Committee had learned about liberal arts education, and an analysis of trends among their first-year students.**

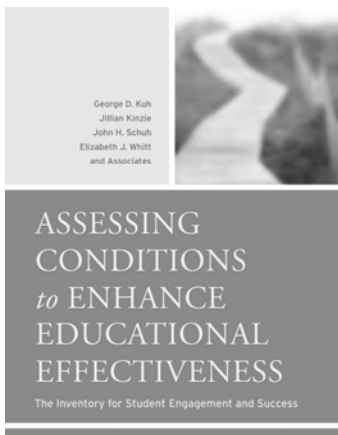
### *The Inventory for Student Engagement and Success (ISES), a self-guided framework*

■ ISES includes sets of diagnostic queries that focus on the **six properties and conditions common to high-performing schools** (*Student Success in College*, Jossey–Bass, 2005) as well as NSSE’s **5 clusters of effective educational practices**

■ **Next-step resource to help institutions assess extent to which DEEP conditions exist**



### ISES Framework for Assessing Student Engagement and Success



- Intended to guide administrators, faculty, staff, & students in evaluating institutional policies and practices with an eye on student success
- By asking “*What are we doing?*” and “*What impact are we having?*” one can determine the effectiveness of policies, programs, and practices
- Intended for use with *Student Success in College*

### Uses for ISES

- To assess entire institution; units- department, academic or student affairs division; or particular groups of students
- Frame accreditation self-studies & program reviews or for organizing staff development, strategic planning, faculty and governing board retreats
- ISES process is similar to institutional self-study - it brings together representatives to review data about the institution and its educational programs, to identify strengths and issues requiring action, and to define strategies to ensure that institutional strengths are maintained and any shortcomings are addressed.
- ISES makes use of available information about students’ experiences and institutional performance

- **Quantitative and qualitative data sources should be combined to answer the diagnostic queries that guide the ISES approach**

#### • **Qualitative data includes:**

- Documents, including campus newspapers, planning documents, students’ written work, admissions materials, both print and electronic
- Observations of student use of and interactions in a residence hall dining area, traffic patterns in the union, and student-faculty interactions in service learning activities
- Individual interviews & focus groups of faculty, students, student affairs staff, & institutional leaders

### ISES Diagnostic Query Topics

1. “Living” Mission & “Lived” Educational Philosophy
2. Unshakeable Focus on Student Learning
3. Environments Adapted for Educational Enrichment
4. Clearly Marked Pathways to Student Success
5. Improvement-Oriented Ethos
6. Shared Responsibility for Educational Quality
7. Institutional Culture
8. Academic Challenge\*
9. Active and Collaborative Learning\*
10. Student-Faculty Interaction\*
11. Enriching Educational Experiences\*
12. Supportive Campus Environments\*

\* Correspond to NSSE Benchmarks of Effective Ed Practice

## 4. Clear Pathways to Student Success



- Guideposts tied directly to academic program, i.e., first-year seminars, others less formal, i.e., convocations that celebrate educational attainment
- Publications accurately describe what students experience
- Redundant early warning systems and safety nets
- Clear messages about the resources and services available to help students succeed and clear expectations for their use

## ISES Diagnostic Queries

### Clear Pathways to Student Success: *Mark the Pathways to Student Success*

- What symbols and actions communicate to newcomers the importance of students and their learning and success?
- To what extent are resources 'front-loaded' to foster students' academic and social success?
- Is the amount of challenge and support consistent with the needs of students and with the institution's educational priorities? Do students who need extra support receive it?
- What policies and practices identify students at risk? To what extent are they used, in what ways, and by whom?

## ISES Diagnostic Queries

### Clear Pathways to Student Success: *Teaching Students How to Succeed*

- What messages do we send to prospective students about:
  - expectations for their performance and outcomes,
  - expectations that students assume a fair share of responsibility for their learning?
  - Do we communicate high expectations to all students – stretching them beyond their perceived limits?

## ISES Diagnostic Queries

### Clear Pathways to Student Success: *Early Warning Systems & Safety Nets*

- What policies and practices identify students at risk? To what extent are they used, in what ways, and by whom? Are they effective?
- Are safety nets (programs, policies, practices) for students in difficulty available and used? Who uses them? Who does not?
- To what extent are these resources, programs, policies, practices, and structures effective, and for whom?

## ISES Diagnostic Queries

### Clear Pathways to Student Success: *Mark the Pathways to Student Success*

- To what extent are resources, structures, programs, policies, and practices consistent with the institution's mission and students' characteristics?
- Are forms of challenge and support consistent with the needs of students and with the institution's educational priorities? Do students who need extra support receive it?

## ISES Diagnostic Queries

### Clear Pathways to Student Success: *Integration of Initiatives*

- Are our resources, programs, policies, practices and structures for student success redundant and responsive?
- In what ways do students' out-of-class lives facilitate or inhibit their learning and success?
- Who collects and disseminates information about students and their experiences?
- Who brings together various pictures of students and their experiences to create a holistic understanding of the quality of undergraduate programs?



### Using ISES in strategic planning:

Student life staff at **Luther College (IA)** using ISES to examine a central strategic planning initiative: “co-curricular learning experiences that support student engagement, discovery, community, leadership, and service.”

**Inventory questions** are being used to explore the extent to which learning outside the classroom is occurring and the programs and practices that foster student engagement most effectively. Of particular interest are the quality of service learning, internships, and study abroad experiences and setting targets for increasing student participation in these high-impact practices.

### ISES Example: North Georgia College and State University

- NGCSU prompted to evaluate programs and policies based on concerns about student use of academic enrichment services, coupled with impending SACS reaccreditation visit and a System mandate to produce a plan to improve retention.
- **Data:** Decline in student use of learning support services; Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory (SSI) revealed students received little feedback on their academic performance during first semester; drop in first-to-second year student persistence rates; examined relationship between NSSE results about quality of advising and timely feedback for FY students and performance patterns for student subgroups

### ISES Example: NGCSU cont'd

To delve more deeply...

- Campus retention task force used ISES protocol to stimulate broader campus discussions about policies, practices, procedures, and processes that create barriers to student success. For example:
  - To what extent are resources “front-loaded” to foster students’ academic and social success? Are these experiences integrated with or tangential to the curriculum? How might they be integrated more effectively?
  - Do all students have equal access to learning and other institutional resources? If some perceive they do not, why is this so?

### ISES Example: NGCSU - Early Alert-Early Intervention System cont'd

- Findings confirmed lack of timely feedback for first-year students; inefficiencies in connecting students to academic support resources; and perception that communication & coordination between student and academic affairs were rare. Data pointed to academic advising as a potential drag on student success. More ISES prompts related to advising were then used
- ISES helped provide a rationale for the NGCSU Early Intervention System project, to identify at-risk students early, and connect them to academic enrichment services and assistance so they can achieve their academic goals

### How might you use ISES?

- **Campus self-study:** Assemble a team to assess the conditions for student success institution-wide
- **Focused study:** Identify a NSSE cluster or DEEP condition in which your campus is under-performing and conduct a focused ISES probe around this topic
- **Unit or function study:** Tailor study around a topic such as admissions and student recruitment, curriculum review, student affairs, campus planning and faculty development



### Reflecting on Your Campus:

- What quantitative and qualitative data do you find helpful in your efforts to assess the FY experience and enhance FY student success?
- What data use issues might you want to explore further on your own campus?
- What barriers exist to using multiple measures ?
- How might you use ISES?
- What do you want to do next?

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